DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 399 077 PS 024 531

AUTHOR Marshall, H. M.; And Others
TITLE Enhancing Young Children's Social Competence: Enhance!/Social Competence Program (ESCP): A Field Developed Program for Children, Teachers and Parents.
PUB DATE Jun 96
NOTE 12p.; Poster presented at the Head Start National Research Conference (3rd, Washington, DC, June 20-23, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; Curriculum; *Early Childhood Education; Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Competence; Parent Participation; Parent School Relationship; Preschool Education; Problem Solving; *Program Effectiveness; Teaching Methods; *Young Children
IDENTIFIERS New York (Rochester); Social Problem Solving; Social Problem Solving Training Programs

ABSTRACT

This poster session report describes the Enhance!/Social Competence Program (ESCP), a program for preschoolers and kindergartners delayed in social competency and problem solving skills. ESCP is part of the Rochester Early Enhancement Program (REEP), a collaboration of agencies serving young children through prenatal education and services, home visiting programs, preschool, after-school, recreation, and summer programs. The goal of ESCP is to help preschool and kindergarten children learn basic social problem solving strategies, based on the premise that children need to use such strategies to deal effectively with everyday interpersonal problems. Three components or units make up ESCP: (1) Language Development (11 activities), emphasizing language skills and concepts; (2) Feelings Identification (15 activities), helping children label and express their feelings and increasing awareness of others' feelings; and (3) Social Thinking and Problem Solving (15 activities), focusing on problem identification, acknowledging feelings, generating multiple solutions, and choosing a solution based on understanding the consequences of one's actions. Results from the 1994-1995 evaluation indicated that four-year-old children who participated in ESCP progressed in their ability to interact with peers and teachers in a constructive manner more than their counterparts from a comparison group. Teacher reports indicated that the ESCP children were more assertive, more comfortable as leaders, participated more in class discussions, appeared to be more liked by classmates, made friends more easily, accepted classroom rules better, showed a better frustration tolerance, and had better task orientation. Contains 27 references. (KDFB)

ED 399 077

Marshall, H.M., Temple, M., Montes, G., and Russell, R.
Head Start's Third National Research Conference
Washington, DC; June 20-23, 1996
Poster Presentation

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Halina M. Marshall
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

# Enhancing Young Children's Social Competence: ENHANCE! / SOCIAL COMPETENCE PROGRAM (ESCP) - A Field Developed Program for Children, Teachers and Parents

## I. General introduction

A child's balanced psychological development and preparation for school is best achieved when his/her needs are met in the context of family, school, and community. High quality preschool programs and collaboration between families and schools are beneficial to children both from the short and long term perspective (Strayhorn, 1988; Henderson, 1991; Parens and Kramer, 1993; Rioux and Berla, 1993). One of the major goals of education in general is to help children become well functioning members of society. The development of a strong social-emotional foundation in a child facilitates his/her ability to successfully interact with others and benefit from the environment. All children must develop interpersonal skills in order to interact effectively with others. The interpersonal relationships that young children establish with parents, teachers and peers affect the ways in which they develop relationships with the larger world for years to come. By teaching young children how to deal effectively with relationships and to use interpersonal problem solving skills in everyday situations, children's social competence is developed and they become more effective members of society (Barnett & Escobar, 1990; Ladd & Asher, 1990; Upshur, 1990; Kumm, 1993; Zigler, Taussig, & Black, 1992).

Poor social-emotional skills affect a child's level of social competence and may, in turn, negatively impact growth in other developmental domains. For example, a young child who is unable to develop a trusting relationship with his/her teacher, or at the very least to follow directions, begins to miss many valuable learning opportunities. Similarly, a child who consistently displays socially inappropriate behavior (e.g. acting out or aggression), diminishes

PS 025231



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

his/her opportunities to develop skills and relationships that are typically developed in the classroom setting. A child needs fundamental social skills to be able to develop close relationships with peers and adults and to benefit from the learning environment of the classroom. Consequently, delays in the acquisition of social competencies at a young age can have a lasting impact on children's school readiness and adjustment. Children who have inadequate skills to communicate their needs, identify basic emotions, and generate appropriate solutions to interpersonal conflicts may have difficulty in forming positive relationships and are unable to fully benefit from the learning environment. Also, the classroom disruptions and complications associated with these children often require a disproportionately large percentage of the teachers' attention. As the number of children entering kindergarten who lack necessary social skills and behavioral control grows, so does the need for prevention and remediation efforts.

It is believed that nearly half of our children have inadequate everyday skills. More specifically, there are many risk factors and disadvantages which young children experience that directly affect their emotional development and social competence. Interpersonal skill deficits have been connected with school maladjustment, poor academic performance, grade retention as well as with later peer rejection, juvenile delinquency, school drop-out, substance abuse, etc. (Kohn, 1977; Seitz, Rosenbaum, & Apfel, 1985; Ladd & Asher, 1990; McGinnis and Goldstein, 1990; Werner, 1990; Ramey & Ramey, 1992; McCall, 1993; Shouse, 1993; Yoshikawa, 1994).

The practice of helping young children develop social competence and problem solving skills exemplifies a preventive approach (Price, Cowen, Lorion, & Ramos-McKay, 1988; Hightower, Johnson, & Haffey, 1990; Upshur, 1990; Werner, 1990; Elias, 1995; Cowen et al., 1996). Accordingly, helping children develop social problem solving skills increases their competence in resolving interpersonal problems and their ability to interact positively with peers and adults. Acquiring such skills enables children to function better in structured settings, to cooperate and take turns, to control impulsive behavior, and to follow group rules. Consequently, the number of school and interpersonal problems and the risk for social

maladjustment decrease (Spivack et al., 1976; Shure & Spivack, 1978; Price et al., 1988; Ladd & Asher, 1990; Mendler, 1990; Zigler, Taussig, & Black, 1992).

Responding to the need of helping many children in Rochester, NY, who enter kindergarten with delays in social competencies and problem solving skills, a group of early childhood educators and researchers pooled their resources to develop the Enhance! / Social Competence Program (ESCP). It has been enabled by the Rochester Early Enhancement Program (REEP) initiative which is a collaborative of agencies serving families with children in the city of Rochester. The purpose of this presentation is to share our efforts, evaluation results, and future research plans in exploring key components of the effective ways to enhance young children's social competence. The REEP collaborative and the ESCP development are briefly described. The importance of teaching young children interpersonal and social problem solving skills, with parents and teachers as partners in facilitating children's acquisition of these skills, is discussed. The benefits of this approach for children, parents and teachers alike are analyzed.

## II. Rochester Early Enhancement Program (REEP)

The Rochester Early Enhancement Program (REEP) is a collaborative of agencies serving families with children in the northeast and southwest sections of the city of Rochester. REEP offers prenatal education and services, home visiting programs, a variety of preschool programs, and after-school, recreation and summer programs. The main strength of REEP is that it brings funders, providers and parents to the same table to discuss how best to serve families with children in the targeted areas. REEP, as a collaborative, respects the autonomy of each individual member agency but also provides a guiding mission for the whole. This mission is founded on a core of guiding principles including a wellness orientation, a community focus, a family orientation, an outcome focused evaluation, and a commitment to be driven by the needs of families. The Rochester Preschool-Parent Program (RPPP) is one of the REEP collaborative agencies. It is the largest neighborhood-based preschool program in the City of Rochester. Seventy five percent of the participating families are minorities and most of their children are

eligible for free lunch. Since 1970, most expansion has occurred in the inner-city elementary schools with hard-to-reach, low income, single parent families. One of the main concerns of these families is the increased violence and neighborhood drug problems. In their efforts to explore how to best raise their preschoolers, these families consider the possibilities and advantages of the verbal problem solving approach while teaching their children to handle interpersonal conflicts, and are open to discussion on how to form a true home-school partnership. Both REEP and RPPP are subject to ongoing evaluation. Some of the first year REEP findings are summarized below.

As a result of participating in REEP program(s):

- parents improved self-esteem and have more appropriate parental attitudes;
- parents felt more confident in raising their children;
- preschool children improved in socialization, cognitive, and language areas over and above developmental norms,
- preschool children improved in school adjustment skills;
- parents felt very satisfied with the type and quality of the REEP services; and
- the vast majority of parents felt that REEP services were not offensive to their values and beliefs about families.

## III. Enhance! /Social Competence Program (ESCP)

The goal of the Enhance! /Social Competence Program (ESCP) is to help preschool and kindergarten children learn basic social problem solving strategies. It is based on the premise that children need to learn how to utilize such strategies in order to deal effectively with problems they encounter in everyday life. In order to achieve this goal children need to learn the basic skills necessary to resolve interpersonal problems. Specifically, children need to learn to think relatively independently so they can adjust to everyday difficulties and interpersonal conflicts. Specifically, they need to learn to identify their problems, recognize the involved emotions, generate possible solutions, and evaluate the ways in which interpersonal problems may be

solved. ESCP offers an approach to teaching children these basic thinking strategies experientially.

ESCP consists of three units: Language Development, Feelings Identification, and Social Thinking and Problem Solving. The activities, which blend easily into a class routine, utilize games, puppets, picture and story books, and songs to teach basic social problem solving concepts and skills.

- Language Development Unit (11 activities) emphasizes language skills and concepts needed to communicate during interpersonal encounters;
- Feelings Identification Unit (15 activities) helps children label and express their own feelings and become aware of the feelings of others, as well as recognize that we all experience a wide range of feelings and that they are a part of our social interactions;
- Social Thinking and Problem Solving Unit (15 activities) focuses specifically on problem identification, acknowledging involved feelings, generating multiple solutions to social dilemmas, and making choices based on understanding the consequences of one's actions to oneself and others.

A Book Index, which is a part of the ESCP Guide, contains a carefully selected listing of annotated children's story and picture books which support the objectives of each ESCP activity.

It is essential to remember that extensive and consistent support over time and across different situations are needed in order for young children to learn new skills and to use them constructively. ESCP was developed by and is designed for use by early childhood teachers, paraprofessionals, parent educators, and parents of young children. Primarily designed for classroom use, ESCP can be used with minor adjustments in a wide range of settings both at home and in school. Consequently, while the ESCP can be used at home or school alone, or in combination, children are likely to benefit most from it when it is implemented extensively for two consecutive years during which newly acquired skills can be repeatedly practiced and reinforced.

The systematic ESCP implementation and evaluation of its impact on children's behavior have been conducted since the first draft of ESCP was developed in 1991-93. Evaluation results are a part of general REEP findings discussed above. Specific ESCP 1994-95 evaluation results indicate that involvement in a comprehensive preschool program such as ESCP may help young children increase their social problem solving skills and therefore contribute to their social development. Consequently these children are more open to positive interpersonal interactions and learning opportunities. Four year old children who participated in the ESCP in 1994-95 have progressed in their ability to interact with peers and teachers in a constructive manner more than their counterparts from the comparison group. The teachers reported that the children were more assertive, more comfortable as leaders and participated more in class discussions. They appeared to be more liked by classmates and made friends more easily. Unlike the children in the comparison group, these children seemed to accept imposed limits and classroom rules better, were able to accept things not going their way, and showed an overall better frustration tolerance. Furthermore, their task orientation was better i.e. they were more likely to be self-starters, worked well without adult support, and were more likely to complete their tasks.

Based on previous findings and discussions, further systematic implementation and evaluation of ESCP at the preschool and kindergarten level have been designed. In 1995-96 the ESCP has been implemented in three RPPP preschool classes, with three other RPPP classes serving as a comparison group. Both the experimental and the comparison group have been evaluated according to a pre-post evaluation design in order to assess the effects of the ESCP implementation on children's gains in social problem solving skills as well as to review measures that may be best suited to evaluate young children's social competence. Information was gathered from multiple sources, including direct observation of children's behavior during structured and free-play activities, teacher input and school data. A pilot study on a sample of kindergarten children is projected for 1996-97.

While classroom ESCP implementation has been evaluated at the preschool level and will be studied at the kindergarten level in the near future, specific strategies for systematic parent involvement also need to be explored. In our study, since every RPPP child's parents engage in a weekly parent group, the opportunity exists to introduce ESCP to the parents of preschool children during these sessions, invite their cooperation and facilitate classroom-home communication and support for ESCP implementation on a regular basis throughout the school year. The RPPP parents can learn about the ESCP in a number of different ways. Frequently they join the children's circle in the classroom before going to their discussion group. They may see the teacher introduce one of the ESCP activities, hear it explained or role-played, and see the children engage in it. Later in the discussion group, parents would have the opportunity to discuss the classroom experience, share ideas about how to incorporate the learning at home, offer their own ideas, and ask questions or describe problems.

Parents may talk about the difficulty of turning a question back to the child as opposed to just telling the child what to do. A key element is the time involved (it takes longer to problem-solve than to tell the child what to do or not to do). They may express their impatience over the time it takes. Also, the solution is unpredictable and may be uncomfortable to the parent. . A frequent concern that then needs to be stressed with parents is the assurance that they too have a voice in the determining of the solution and can guide their child in learning what is acceptable. Overall, parents see the ESCP activities implemented in the classroom and the problem solving principles utilized during interpersonal conflicts occurring in the classroom. They see that the children's feelings are reflected, the involved children are asked how they can solve the problem, and are guided and supported by the teacher until a solution acceptable to all involved parties is reached.

The role of the parent group leader is also important. Parents often need to role play before the process is understood and accepted. Language development, as well as creative and critical thinking need to be identified as they emerge and tied to the larger picture of the ESCP. The parent group leader needs to facilitate discussion on how the principles and process of the

ESCP can be used at home. Each week some time can be spent in the parent group sharing the classroom and home experiences. The teacher - paraprofessional team can share with parents specific examples from the classroom. When parents start trying the process and vocabulary at home with success, the group may become more interested and committed to the process. In the classroom, the teachable moments are turned into an opportunity for identifying and solving problems, and parents taking their turn in assisting the teacher can observe that process. When parents share frustrations over home experiences, their feelings can be reflected in their group meetings, they can be guided in examining that process, and the group may "problem-solve" how the home situation can be successfully resolved.

## IV. Summary

All children must learn independent and critical thinking and social problem solving skills in order to function as productive adults. Research indicates that children as young as age four are able to acquire and apply in their everyday life basic social problem solving strategies and that children who are taught social problem solving skills have a better understanding of interpersonal problem situations and a greater sensitivity for the needs and feelings of others. However, these strategies and skills need to be taught in a systematic manner and consistently supported by all adults involved in the young child's development. As discussed earlier, learning basic social problem solving skills enhances young children's social competence and thus contributes to strengthening their overall social-emotional development. Since the child's balanced social-emotional development forms the foundation for his/her later good self-concept, adjustment in school, being open to acquiring academic skills, forming friendships, and being able to communicate effectively with peers and adults, the importance of helping young children to learn these skills early cannot be underestimated.

Utilizing a systematic approach to teaching children skills that enhance their social competence, such as ESCP, benefits not only children, but also their parents and teachers. All parents want their children to do well in school, to get along with others and be liked by others,

as well as to resist undesirable influences and avoid the failures that plague many adolescents.

Since parents are the young child's primary and most important teachers, the ESCP can:

- give parents a sense of knowledgeable and effective parenting,
- help them teach these basic skills more effectively,
- empower them in supporting their child's development,
- help give children a sense of control over their emerging social abilities,
- help parents respect the child's point of view, needs, and feelings,
- promote friendly and affectionate interaction between the child and parent,
- help them avoid some common pitfalls and enhance the parent-child interactive learning that will last well beyond the early childhood period.

This approach is consistent with the general current conceptualizations and models of parent participation in early childhood development and education. It reiforces and supports the widely accepted view that parent involvement is a crucial component of early childhood programs and conversely that working with young children alone may be significantly less effective.

Optimizing young children's general development and school readiness is one of the basic goals of early childhood teachers. Working with teachers in the development, planning and implementation of social skills enhancement programs helps them teach children skills that children can utilize in the classroom, family and later in the larger community. Teachers need to understand the process of social skills acquisition, be assured of support and constructive feedback, and be encouraged to teach and promote daily use of these skills repeatedly over extended periods of time. The programs, such as ESCP, need to be age-appropriate, fit in the classroom format, and enhance collaborative approach to working together to help children attain social competence. This approach facilitates establishing cooperation among parents, teachers and mental health professionals. It focuses on children's healthy development and on preventive rather than reactive and remedial responses to potential future social skills deficits and school adjustment concerns. Ultimately the children, parents, and teachers benefit from incorporating this preventive approach into the early childhood education.

**REFERENCES**

Barnett, D.W. and Carey, K.T. (1992). Designing interventions for preschool learning and behavior problems. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Barnett, W. S. & Escobar, C. M. (1990). Economic costs and benefits of early intervention. In S. J. Meisels & J. P. Shonkoff (Eds.), Handbook of Childhood Intervention (PP. 560-582). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boyer, E.L. (1991). Ready to learn. A mandate for the Nation. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Campbell, S.B. (1990). Behavior problems in preschool children. New York: The Guilford Press.

Cowen, E.L., Hightower, A.D., Pedro-Carroll, J.L., Wyman, P.A. & Haffey, W.G. (1996). School-Based Prevention for Children at Risk. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Elias, M.J. and Tobias, S.E. (1996). Social Problem Solving. Interventions in the Schools. New York: The Guilford Press.

Henderson, A.T. (Ed.).(1991). The evidence continues to grow. Parent involvement improves student achievement. Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Hightower, A. D., Johnson, D., & Haffey, W. G. (1990). Best practices in adopting a prevention program. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), Best Practices In School-II (pp. 63-79). Washington, D. C: The National Association of School Psychologist.

Kohn, M. (1977). Social competence, symptoms and underachievement in childhood: A longitudinal perspective. Washington, DC.: Winston.

Kumm, A. R. (1993). Working to make it happen. Prevention Partnerships. New York Head Start Association, Task Force on Alcohol and Other Drugs. Quarterly Newspaper, vol.2 #3.

Ladd, G. W. & Asher, S. R. (1990). Social skills training and children's peer relations. In L. L'Abate & M. A. Milan (Eds.), Handbook of Social Skills Training and Research (pp. 219-244). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Mendler, A. N. (1990). Smiling at yourself. Education young children about stress and self esteem. Santa Cruz, CA: Network Publications.

McGinnis, E. and Goldstein, A.P. (1990). Skillstreaming in early childhood. Teaching prosocial skills to the preschool and kindergarten child. Champaign, Ill.: Research Press Company.

McCall, R.B. Preventing antisocial behavior and school failure. A briefing paper for policymakers. Univ. of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

Parens, H. and Kramer, S. (Eds.).(1993). Prevention in mental health. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc.

Price, R. H., Cowen, E. L. Lorion, R. P., & Ramos-McKay, J. (Eds.). (1988). 14 ounces of prevention: A casebook for practitioners. Washington, D. C: American Psychological Association.

Ramey, S.L. and Ramey, C.T.. (1992). Early educational intervention with disadvantaged children - To what effect?. Applied and Preventive Psychology, 1:131-140.

Rioux, J.W. and Berla, N. (1993). Innovations in parent and family involvement. Princeton Junction, NJ: Eye on Education Inc.

Seitz, V., Rosenbaum, L. K., & Apfel, N. H. (1985). Effects of family support intervention: A 10 year follow-up. Child development, 56, 376-391.

Shouse, C. (1991). High/Scope Resource. Spring.

Shure, M. B. & Spivack, G. (1978). Problem-solving techniques in childrearing. San Francisco: Jossey-Brass.

Spivack, G., Platt, J. J., & Shure, M. B. (1976). The problem-solving approach to adjustment. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Strayhorn, J.M. (1988). The competent child. New York: The Guilford Press.

Upshur, C. C. (1990). Early intervention as prevention intervention. In S. J. Meisels & J. P. Shonkoff (Eds.), Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention (pp. 633-650). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Werner, E.E. (1990). Protective factors and individual resilience. In S. J. Meisels & J. P. Shonkoff (Eds. ), Handbook of Early childhood Intervention (pp. 97-116). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yoshikawa, H. (1994). Prevention as cumulative protection: Effets of early family support and education on chronic delinquency and its risks. Psychological Bulletin, 115, 1, 1-27.

Zigler, E., Taussig, C., & Black, K. (1992). Early childhood intervention: A promising prevention for juvenile delinquency. American Psychologist, 997-1006.